

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

INDO-US STRATEGIC RELATIONS
MOVING FROM ESTRANGEMENT TO ENGAGEMENT

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LONG PAPER
COURSE 5603, 5604, 5605

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Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 2003		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2003 to 00-00-2003	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Indo-US Strategic Relations Moving from Estrangement to Engagement				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The original document contains color images.					
14. ABSTRACT see report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 64	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

INDO – US STRATEGIC RELATIONS
MOVING FROM ESTRANGEMENT TO ENGAGEMENT

“I have tried to justify his (President GW Bush’s) confidence by energetically promoting his vision of India as a rising great power of the 21st century, and his primary goal of the world’s oldest and largest democracies operating together to transform their relations, to forge concentrated strategic collaboration for the decades ahead”

Robert Blackwill
US Ambassador to India

INTRODUCTION

‘*The Buddha has smiled*’. With these words the chief scientist of India’s Nuclear Test Programme signaled to Mr AB Vajpayee, the Indian Prime Minister in Delhi that the planned nuclear tests (also known as the Pokharn Tests) had been successfully carried out at 9 AM on 11 May 98. There was, predictably, no cause for smiles in the Clinton administration in Washington, however; they were surprised and stunned by these entirely unexpected tests. Sanctions were automatically imposed on India following these tests, as mandated by Section 102 of the Arms Export Control Act, otherwise known as the Glenn

Amendment¹. Not only the US but several other countries including Russia, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, UK, France, China, Denmark, Sweden, South Africa, Finland as well as the UN expressed dismay and shock, and some imposed their own set of sanctions. However these measures did not have the intended effect on the Indian economy². Yet just four years after these tests India's relations with all these countries were back on an even keel and indeed flourishing. With the United States relations have taken a dramatic turn with real transformation underway in the quality and intensity of consultation and co operation³ especially in strategic areas. For example Washington held eight rounds of talks (also referred to as the Singh-Talbot talks) with New Delhi between June 1998 and February 1999. This became the longest extended strategic dialogue between senior American and Indian officials ever to take place.⁴ In fact in the last two years alone over a hundred officials of the President's Cabinet and other senior officials have visited India, which is very rare in itself.⁵ Over twenty institutional forums and working groups at the government level are now in place. The tragic events of September 11 2002 have also contributed to this transformation. That event lead to the universal realization that there are too many divides, too many fractures, too much disparity, too much imbalance of power and too much inequality in the international community for people not to feel threatened and afraid. 9/11 proved that security challenges in an imperfect world are unlikely to disappear. Only their nature changes. It is under these circumstances that Indo US strategic relations are undergoing the dramatic transformation alluded to earlier.

¹ Testimony of Karl Inderfurth, Asst Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs on May 13, 1998, Washington DC.

² Chintamani Mahaptara, Indo US Relations – Into the 21 st Century (New Delhi : Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis : 1998), 165

³ Speech by Mr Kapil Sibal, Foreign Secretary of India, at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 04 Feb 03.

⁴ Stephen P Cohen, India Emerging Power, Brookings Institute Press, 2001. 285.

⁵ Press Trust of India, US Envoy Blackwill Quits, Indian Express, April 21 , 2003.

Nowhere has this engagement grown more than in the area of military and defence. Given the ‘dialogue of the deaf’⁶ characteristics that Indo US defence relationship exhibited until 1998 the dramatic nature of the transformation is all the more apparent.

What is the real reason for this transformation? How will this relationship develop ? To what level can this relationship be expected to rise? Will it flourish or flounder ? Is there a fundamental change in the international geopolitical dynamic that will ensure the continuity of this relationship? Are there any precedents for the US and India to emulate and serve as guides? These are important questions because it is for the first time in history that the most powerful and most populous democracies of the world are seeking to establish a partnership taking them into uncharted waters.

What is a Strategic Partnership?

The term ‘strategic’ is primarily concerned with the ways in which actors use military power and capability to achieve political goals.⁷ In interstate relations it signifies the primacy of the military and security disciplines and issues as determinants of the relationship. Another view of the term ‘strategic’ is when each side views the other as integral to its own national security, internal stability and territorial integrity.⁸ A ‘strategic relationship’ between two countries has, therefore, to be founded on a sound and resilient security and military partnership. That is not to say that economy, trade, commerce, culture, technology, politics, education and diplomatic interactions are insignificant. These relations are no doubt necessary ingredients of the relationship, but when the relationship is strategic in nature it must necessarily be driven by military and security compulsions.

⁶ Dennis Kux *India and the United States Estranged Democracies* (NDU Press Washington DC 1993) 134.

⁷ Graham Evans, Jeffrey Newham *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* (Penguin Books: London, 1998), 518.

⁸ Brenda Shaffer, *Partners in Need- The Strategic Relationship of Russia and Iran*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy paper No 57, 2001, xi.

This is all the more necessary in the case of India and the US because the relationship thus far has not been predicated on significant economic, cultural or ethnic ties but on strategic issues of concern i.e unjustifiable US support to Pakistan for India and nuclear non proliferation for the US. The thesis of this paper is that, unless the two countries manage to develop a robust strategic relationship other interactions, especially economic and commercial relations, are unlikely to attain their full potential. Indeed a strategic partnership can provide the secure environment for India that will allow economic growth to accelerate to the desired level which can benefit both countries equally.

Outline of the Paper

The paper will first trace the genesis of the Indo-US estrangement during the period 1947 to 1998. This will shed light on the issues that were the cause for this estrangement. During this same period the US established close strategic relations with three of its long standing allies in the Asia-Pacific region, viz. Korea, Japan and Australia. How and why these partnerships attained strategic status will be analysed. Two issues that sustained these strategic partnerships were the convergence of *strategic cultures* and *security interests*. The paper will, therefore, examine the strategic cultures and security interests of India and the US to establish if these are congruent and compatible. The economic dimension of the Indo-US relationship will also be discussed, if only to establish its influence on strategic relations. The paper will end with suggestions for the way forward.

THE YEARS OF ESTRANGEMENT (1947 – 1998)

An objective prognosis of the prospect of this relationship cannot be attempted without examining its nature from 1947 (the year India became independent) through 1998 (when the engagement of the two countries expanded).

During WW II the Allied powers established the China-India-Burma theatre, headquartered in New Delhi, for providing supplies to the beleaguered armies of Chaing Kai-shek over the Himalayan 'hump'. Although the campaign was led by the British, by the war's end the United States had almost 250,000 American troops in NE India, almost entirely from the supply and engineer branches, where they built numerous airfields⁹. This was and has been the most extensive 'military contact' between the two countries to date. After the war ended, these troops were immediately withdrawn from India to assuage the bruised sensitivities of the Indian leaders over US support for the British, whom the US obviously did not want to offend during the war. In effect, the US was trying to balance its strategic compulsions, of supporting the Nationalists in China by allying with the British, with its desire to support the cause for Indian independence which was obviously anti British. It is ironical that 58 years after that event a similar strategic compulsion, this time of containing China, is probably once again attracting US interest in India. And yet again the US finds it self playing a balancing role, but this time between its interests in Pakistan and India.

Allying with the British in WWII was the beginning of the estrangement process between the two countries. However the first seeds of distrust between the two countries were really sown over the Kashmir issue immediately after India's independence. Nehru was incensed that the US sought to equate the aggressor, Pakistan, with the victim, India when the former aided and abetted the tribal invasion of the state of Jammu and Kashmir

⁹ Dennis Kux, 24.

in October 1947. The US position on Kashmir continued to be a point of friction between the two countries, and in fact still is. Until 1960, policy differences between the two countries continued to be troublesome, but with US policy in South Asia in general being nebulous, it was left to the British to provide the military hardware and support to India with the hope of keeping the Soviets out. On the other hand the US sought to arm Pakistan, which had wholeheartedly become a compliant partner in advancing the US policy of containment. The decision to arm Pakistan was also a subconscious way of hitting back at India for Nehru's neutralist approach and chronic moralizing about American foreign policy.¹⁰ This set into motion a series of foreign policy changes in India that finally led to its hardening of the stand on Kashmir and the inevitable closer security relationship with the USSR. Eisenhower would later call the American policy judgment (of pandering to Pakistan rather than India) into question but could not reverse the course of history.¹¹

Despite arms-to-India being a British responsibility, India continued to eye American arms, especially the F 104 fighter and the Sidewinder SAMs. When these were not forthcoming, given American fear of upsetting Pakistan the existing recipient, India decided to turn to the Soviet Union in 1962. The MiG 21 offered by the Soviets on extremely generous terms, could not be matched by either the US or UK despite efforts by them to sway the Indian decision.

Even before the ink on the Soviet deal had dried, the Chinese army struck across the Mc Mahon line in NE India in October 1962. The Indian Army was routed in the ensuing battle. With the Indian defences about to collapse, Nehru sought US assistance for arms, especially aircraft and air defence equipment. President Kennedy, engaged as he

¹⁰ Dennis Kux, 114.

¹¹ Andrew Rotter, Comrades at Odds- The United States and India 1947 – 1964, Cornell University Press, London 2000, 64.

was in the Cuban missile crisis, agreed to the request because he wanted to “demonstrate to Asia that Washington was ready and able to assist against Chinese communist aggression”. Even so this aid was restricted to only small arms, ammunition and communication equipment.¹² Not only was the requested air defence hardware not forthcoming, but the US ambassador in New Delhi actively discouraged India from escalating the conflict by the use of air power¹³, although that was sure to have reversed some of the setbacks suffered by the Indian troops. Fortunately with the ensuing harsh Himalayan winter, the Chinese announced a unilateral ceasefire and pulled back their troops by November 1962. The reluctance of President Kennedy to provide the air defence equipment sought, however, left an unpleasant after taste for the Indians for two reasons. Firstly, because the Kennedy administration sought to use military aid to pressure India to resolve the Kashmir issue with Pakistan. Secondly, because the State Department suggested that a protracted Indo Chinese conflict would not be such a bad thing since it would demand the absorption of “Chinese energies” and “we would be less likely to hear the Indians plead the Chinese case in the UN and elsewhere”.¹⁴ Nevertheless after the shock of the Chinese conflict, Nehru permitted the US to stage U2 flights into Tibet through India, cleared the conduct of joint exercises between the two Air Forces, and permitted the Americans to place a nuclear powered device in the Himalayas to monitor Chinese missile development. It appeared that the US wanted to make the most of the situation in India’s moment of weakness.

Except for this brief interlude, Washington preferred to deal with India largely through the British because it had special influence in India, where a “great fund of genuine

¹² Dennis Kux, 206

¹³ Chintamani Mahapatra, 94.

¹⁴ Andrew Rotter, 75.

goodwill, confidence and even affection towards the United Kingdom persisted".¹⁵ But by 1965 the British had decided to withdraw from east of the Suez, the Soviets had managed to sway crucial weapon deals with India and the US was enmeshed in Vietnam. With India staying clear of the Soviet orbit, with its non aligned policy, America interest in India waned.

The 1965 Indo-Pak conflict once again saw the US getting involved in the sub continent. The US imposed an arms embargo on both countries which obviously had a greater impact on Pakistan because of its greater dependence on US arms. In the process the US ended up infuriating India since it perceived it as an attempt to again equate the victim (India) with the aggressor (Pakistan). Ostensibly the US wanted to halt the fighting in order to preclude the possibility of Chinese involvement on Pakistan's behalf and the Soviet Union's on India's.¹⁶

While the US at least attempted to play a balancing role in the 1965 conflict it shed all such pretence in the 1971 conflict. Although the mandatory arms embargo was again imposed on both countries, it was the decision to dispatch the USS Enterprise carrier group to the Indian Ocean, that was viewed by all Indians as a brazen act of coercive diplomacy; an act that is difficult to erase from the collective Indian memory even today. There may have been an element of warning to India in this action, but some observers claim that the US action was directed more at reassuring Beijing of US reliability as an ally (of Pakistan and indirectly of China which was being courted because of its split with the Soviets) than antagonizing New Delhi. In any event the incident drove home the undeniable fact that objectives to which Pakistan contributed were worth the negative

¹⁵ Andrew Rotter, 47.

¹⁶ Satu p Limaye, US-Indian Relations: The Pursuit of Accommodation Westview Press, Colorado, 1993. 56.

impact on India and Indo-US relations. To a proud post independence India this indicated that the US did not treat India seriously, a possibility perhaps even more wounding psychologically than deliberate hostility.¹⁷

Indo US strategic relations therefore were driven principally by cold war dynamics of both countries. Did the United States and India have strategic relations with other countries during the Cold War period and if so what was the nature of that relationship? Enquiry of this aspect can shed light on the conditions under which these relations developed and if there are lessons to draw upon, for both countries, but especially for India. The United States of course established a variety of security alliances during this period. Not all of them can be classified as strategic. The notable strategic alliances in the Asia-Pacific region are the US -Japan Security Treaty (1951), the Mutual Security Agreement (1954) with the Republic of Korea and the ANZUS Treaty (1951) with Australia and New Zealand.

US STRATEGIC RELATIONS WITH JAPAN, AUSTRALIA AND KOREA

US – Japan Security Alliance (1951)

Originally the alliance was a traditional security alliance, intended to protect Japan from Soviet communism as well as to contain Japan. However, it stimulated, and for its endurance almost certainly required, the development of complex interdependence between Japan and the United States. That relationship is now broad based encompassing a range of common values, common interests and political processes. The collapse of the Soviet Union removed the glue that bound the alliance together and the question has

¹⁷ Limaye, 59.

periodically arisen whether the general objective of providing ‘regional stability’ is enough to overcome periodical bilateral tensions. The matter was put to rest after an alliance review by Japan in 1995, concluded that the alliance was indispensable to Japanese security and was the key to regional peace and security.¹⁸

The US-Japan alliance, in its bilateral context was always accepted as an asymmetrical treaty. There have nonetheless been costs and benefits to both countries. In Japan, a lack of military flexibility is seen as a benefit by pacifists, but as a cost by others who want Japan to be a ‘normal’ country. In the past the benefit to Japan was the reduced threat of attack from Soviet Union and savings on military expenditure that would otherwise have occurred. Benefits also included US aid and access to US technologies. Today the benefits are a stable region in which there is no strategic vacuum, assurance against threats from N Korea and continuing access to US military technology and intelligence. The costs to Japan include the humiliation of accepting the victor’s military presence on its soil long after WWII and the associated social and political costs.

Some strategists in the US see Japanese rearmament as a cost while others see it a benefit. The definite benefits to the US were the denial of Japan to Soviet communism and the availability of bases in a critical region.

The alliance has been quite robust so far, in part due to effective alliance management and has survived numerous tensions, which at times seemed to undermine its durability. Economic differences in the early 1970s and mid 1990s were perhaps the one area where the alliance was at risk and there is no guarantee that differences will not arise in the future. Strains and tensions are inevitable in any substantial bilateral relationship, US Japan are not exceptions. However, common interests, substantial shared values and

¹⁸ Robert D Blackwill and Paul Dibb, America’s Asian Alliances, The MIT press, Cambridge, MA, 2000. 31.

compatible political processes as well as the wide range of non security links greatly buttress the relationship. Nonetheless the risk exists that constant carping over particular issues will get out of control and people will lose sight of the larger picture. This is where mature statesmanship in both countries can make the difference.

The US – Australia Alliance

This is by far the most robust of all the alliances in the Asia Pacific region. The treaty was initially signed partly to allay Australian concerns at what was seen as a soft treaty with Japan after WWII. The strength of the treaty is the shared values between the two countries, perpetuated by the bonds forged in WWII, Korea, Vietnam and more recently the 1991 Gulf War.

With the end of the cold war, containing communism is no longer the sole rallying cry for keeping the treaty alive. The Sydney Statement of 1999 has restated the purpose of the alliance; to promote democracy, economic development and strategic stability, to eschew the use of force in international disputes and to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Nevertheless, although the alliance is not in danger of breaking up, differences of perception and approach to security issues in the Asia Pacific region are growing. For the United States, the areas of concern are North East and South Asia. Australia is more focused on the island chain to its immediate north in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. This is exemplified by the East Timor crisis where the Australians were shocked to learn that the US would not commit troops in East Timor since its vital national interests

were not involved.¹⁹ In Australia, East Timor attracted very unusual levels of public arousal, but in the US there was barely a ripple. The US Australia alliance is likely to come under pressure as new issues emerge and geographic interests diverge. But given the history of benefits to both alliance partners and their continuing shared interests and aspirations as well as shared strategic cultures, there is much to gain and little comparative cost in preserving the relationship and its substantial advantages.

US – South Korea Mutual Security Agreement (1954)

This agreement was inked in 1954 with the clear and consistent purpose of deterring aggression from North Korea. This is primarily a military agreement that allows the US to base approximately 37,000 troops in South Korea permanently. No doubt the deterrent value of this arrangement has worked but of late cracks have started developing. The opposition to the presence of US troops is growing due to a variety of reasons; not least because the US help during the Korean war has begun to fade from the collective memory of the younger generation of Koreans. Nonetheless both countries realize that until the Korean peninsula is peaceful, prosperous, nuclear free and reunified, the US-Korea security alliance will remain relevant.

Analysis of US Alliances in Asia

It is quite clear that, in Asia at least, the US – Australian strategic alliance has been, and continues to be, the most successful of the three. Convergence of national interests (i.e. containment of communism) did certainly contribute to the success during the Cold War, but that cannot explain the continuing robustness of the US- Australian relationship. This is by no means an accident of history. The answer lies in the near identical strategic cultures of the two peoples, derived as it is from their common Anglo Saxon ancestry.

¹⁹ Blackwill and Paul Dibb, 98.

That is not to say that the other two alliances were not successful. The reasons for their success, however, lie elsewhere. In the case of Korea containing and deterring communism became the unwavering common objective. The same was true for Japan as well, but in addition, the acceptance of the US as the guarantor of Japanese security conditioned the relationship. Absent shared strategic interests, the relationship could enter an era of uncertainty; as is indeed the case with South Korea where dissent and opposition to US presence is on the rise. Convergence of security interests, it appears, can certainly draw two countries together, but it is the common strategic cultures that can keep the relationship going even in the absence of such interests. Strategic culture determines when for what purposes and how national power may be used and applied. The powerful develop strategic cultures different from the weak. What are the strategic cultures of the Indian security community and is its counterpart in the US? In light of the analysis above it is necessary to seek answers to this question.

STRATEGIC CULTURES

US Strategic Culture

American strategic culture is rooted in “exceptionalism”²⁰, a term used to describe the belief that the US is an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history; a nation that is not only unique but also superior. The second main element of the belief is that, unlike other great nations, the United States is not destined to rise and fall. The third main element of exceptionalism is that the New World is different and separate from the Old World of Europe (even though most Americans are of European descent).

²⁰ Trevor B McCrisken, Exceptionalism in encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy (2nd ed), vol 2, New York Scribner’s 2001. 1.

The last belief has led Robert Kagan, in his article “Power and Weakness” to comment that Americans and Europeans no longer share a common strategic culture.²¹ The US resorts to force more quickly and compared to Europe is less patient with diplomacy. Americans generally see the world divided between good and evil, between friends and enemies. ‘If you are not with us you are against us’ President GW Bush threateningly proclaimed after 9/11. Little wonder that US administrations could never come to terms with the namby-pamby notion of ‘non-alignment’ crafted by ‘left leaning’ neutral leaders such as Nehru and generally viewed as the high water mark of Indian foreign policy during the Cold War.

Americans generally favour policies of coercion rather than persuasion, emphasizing punitive sanctions over inducements to better behaviour; the stick over the carrot. They tend to seek finality in international affairs: they want problems solved, threats eliminated. Europeans insist they approach problems with greater nuance and sophistication. They are more tolerant of failure, more patient when solutions don’t come quickly. They generally favour peaceful responses to problems preferring negotiation, diplomacy and persuasion to coercion. They are quicker to appeal to international law, international conventions and international opinion to adjudicate disputes. Despite what many Europeans and some Americans believe, these differences in strategic culture do not spring naturally from the national characters of Americans and Europeans.²² They have evolved over the years and are, therefore, a product of the collective experiences of the two peoples. After all what Europeans now consider their more peaceful strategic culture is, historically speaking quite new. And America’s eighteenth and early nineteenth-century statesmen sounded much like the European statesmen of today. When United States was

²¹ Robert Kagan, Power and Weakness, Policy Review, Issue 113 (June – July 2002), Stanford University press, 2002. 1.

²² Kagan , 2

weak it practiced the strategies of indirection, the strategies of weakness; now that the United States is powerful, it behaves as powerful nations do. The famous Melian dialogue from the Peloponnesian Wars , ‘the strong do what they have the power to do, and the weak accept what they have to accept’, rings ever true today as it did then.

What characterizes the American strategic culture? It is the tradition established by Andrew Jackson, the sixth president of the United States. It is less an intellectual or political movement than an expression of the social, cultural and religious values of a large portion of the American public. More than any other value the Jacksonian concept of power, especially military power, dominates American foreign policy. The roots of this stretch back to the days of the first settlers who were a hardy people with a culture and outlook formed by centuries of bitter warfare before they came to the new world. The principles of the Jacksonian code are ; *honour* - respect and dignity must be given when and where due; *self reliance* – they don’t rely on inherited wealth or connections, but value hard work ; *equality* – they remain independent of church, state, social hierarchy and do not accept imposed authority; *individualism* – each person has a right and obligation to find his or her own way and finally the love affair with fire arms – the *right to bear arms* is a mark of civic and social equality.

The Jacksonian tradition is particularly visible in the practice of American foreign policy. The perception of outsiders that American foreign policy is an unhealthy mix of ignorance, isolationism and trigger-happy cowboy diplomacy is not far from the truth. So influential is Jacksonian opinion in the formation of American foreign policy that anyone lacking a feel for it will find much of American policy baffling and opaque. Foreigners in particular have either overestimated or underestimated American determination because

they failed to grasp the structure of Jacksonian opinion and influence. Jacksonians are hard core realists. They, therefore, believe that the international system is anarchic and violent. In such a system American diplomacy must be cunning, forceful and the armed forces must be vigilant, strong and ready to fight; even pre-emptive wars if necessary. Jacksonians are more likely to pressure political leaders to fight such wars than worry about niceties of international law. The face off with Iraq was testimony of this fact. Jacksonians supported the 1991 Gulf War not because Kuwait was attacked, nor because it was the US obligation under the UN Charter to defend a member nation from aggression, but because America's oil supply was threatened. The war was about the defence of America's vital national interests. In the absence of clearly defined threats to the national interest Jacksonian opinion is much less aggressive.²³ However another reason over which Jacksonian Americans are willing to go to war is in defence of national honour. Once the US extends a security guarantee or makes a promise it will honour that promise come what may. It is national honour more than vital strategic interest that would require the US to fulfill its promise to protect Taiwan from invasion.

When it comes to war, Jacksonian America has clear ideas about how wars must be fought, how enemies should be treated and what should happen when the wars are over. Firstly, wars must be fought with all available force. To engage in limited war is one of the costliest political decisions an American president can make. Secondly the main tactical and strategic objective of war must be to impose American will on the enemy with as few casualties as possible. The enemy must be crushed as quickly, thoroughly and professionally as possible. In fact Jacksonians view that the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were perfectly justified and morally right. Thirdly, Jacksonians have strong

²³ Kagan, 13.

ideas about how wars should end. There is no substitute to victory and that the only way to achieve it is through the unconditional surrender of the enemy where upon the honour code demands that the enemy must be treated magnanimously. But when foreign enemies lack the good taste to surrender the grudge will be carried for decades. Some of the anti-China feeling in the US today dates back to the mistreatment of American GI s during the Korean War. The mullas of Iran, the assassins of Libya and Fidel Castro have never been forgiven by Jacksonian opinion for their crimes against and defiance of the United States. Nor will they be forgiven until they acknowledge their sins.

Jacksonian influence in the American policy establishment is enormous. It matters not whether it is a Republican or Democratic administration. The US cannot wage a major war without Jacksonian support; once engaged, politicians cannot safely end the war except on Jacksonian terms. For foreign observers, when Jacksonian sentiment favours a given course of action the US will move too far, too fast and too unilaterally in the pursuit of its goals. When this sentiment is opposed, the US will be seen to move slowly or not at all. For any one wishing to anticipate the course of American policy, an understanding of the structure of Jacksonian beliefs and values is essential.

Indian Strategic Culture

Going by Jacksonian tradition, it is not unreasonable to conclude that most Americans see 'expansionism' as the logical extension of power; If you have it, you use it. They see 'space' as available, beckoning those outside to occupy it, settle it, master it. Space was more exciting, more democratic, more liberated. It was the white American right, and American Indians, Europeans or Mexicans who challenged the right of a white

American were removed or destroyed.²⁴ The notion of 'space' has of course undergone a metamorphosis. While in the past it meant physical space today it means any sphere of human endeavour; business, art, science, military and culture.

In the past, space was, for the common Indian at least, uninviting, perhaps uninteresting, and almost certainly threatening. It was a disturbing unknown where more bad things happen than good. Under these circumstances pointless quests into 'space' and beyond were unnecessarily risky. Risk aversion was therefore the natural fall out of this world view. Although by the 5th century BC Indian seafarers had sailed across the Indian Ocean to SE Asia, Africa and Arabia, this enterprise was more in pursuit of benign trade and promotion of culture rather than conquest. India society was so well adapted to colonialism that little or no force was considered necessary.²⁵ No doubt these accomplishments could not have been possible without considerable risk to life and limb, but the fact remains that seafaring was a preserve and vocation of the lower castes; not the privileged upper castes who controlled the power of the state. To them, lands that lay beyond the borders of India were of no consequence, expansion was never an opportunity and seldom a possibility. In fact so deep rooted was the aversion to travel that Indian students rarely traveled to the US before WWII because 'it seemed too distant to Indians'.²⁶ Things are of course quite different now with the number of Indians topping the list of overseas students in American universities.

If strategic vision and culture is rooted in civilisational and religious ethos, then religious traditions in particular definitely mould the thoughts and perceptions of the

²⁴ Andrew J Rotter, 40

²⁵ Joel Larus, Culture and Political-Military Behaviour: The Hindus in Pre Modern India Columbia, Mo South Asia books, 1979, 191.

²⁶ Andrew J Rotter, 43

ruling elite of a country. Thus, over the millennia, Hinduism, the principal faith of the majority in the subcontinent, played a central role in shaping the cultural patterns, the norms and structures of its society, and ultimately even the strategic thought and culture. Dr S Radhakrishnan, India's philosopher president had expressed that, 'through the centuries Indian society has always venerated the sage in preference to the statesman and a learned man instead of a warrior. The importance of wealth and power, though theoretically recognised, was never practically realised.'

The influence of Hindu philosophy of universal peace and non-violence, on India's ruling classes, so effectively put into practice by the Mahatma, is perhaps the single most significant cause of the pacifist nature of India's strategic culture. This prevented the growth of proper security thought, truncated the concept of power and left little military surplus beyond what was necessary for control of internal order and for achieving minimal regional dominance.

Another manifestation of this total pre-occupation with the management of internal order was that adversaries were confronted only after invasion, then too, on a ground of the former's choosing; they were never of course pursued and threats were not recognised until they actually occurred. They were neither anticipated nor neutralised beyond the natural boundary. At the dawn of independence, therefore, the ruling elite of India could not have but been moulded by the centuries old pacifist philosophy of the Indian civilisation. Peace it was perceived, would naturally provide a secure environment. This led to the minimalist approach in the management of defence, often encouraging external aggression. The British, more than any other foreign power, had the most significant impact on strategic culture of the India elite.

They were undoubtedly the first to introduce to their many colonies, institutions necessary for the governance of a nation state, including India. The institution of the military was their principal and most significant contribution during the 200 years of the Raj. Nonetheless, despite their significant contribution, the Imperial forces did not employ Indians in their officer Corps. During the entire period of British rule, policy about the defence of India and its external relations had been the preserve, total and exclusive, of the British alone, and that too directed from Whitehall.²⁷ No Indian was involved in formulating foreign or defence policies.

The cumulative consequence of the imperial legacy was that, although the country inherited a robust and pan-national military capability after independence, this military was grossly short of a resource pool of talent and personnel specialising in defence, and for that matter, foreign policy formulation. Besides, the British intentionally kept the Indian military industrial base at a very low level of technology, with a view to preserve their own industry in Britain. The centuries old Indian ethos of disinterest and complacency towards strategic thinking, therefore, continued to be the Achilles heel even after independence. This historical baggage could not of course be shed overnight, but the status quo was perpetuated by two other developments; firstly by *Nehru's attitude and personality* and secondly by an *elitist and arrogant bureaucracy*. Both these had a significant influence on the *development of strategic culture*.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister, strode the Indian political scene like a colossus for nearly two decades after independence. His personality left a mark on every aspect of national endeavour for many decades even after his death. Nehru was an idealist and a romanticist. He did not encourage institutional strategic thinking, policy formulation

²⁷ Jaswant Singh, Defending India, Bangalore, Mac Millan India Ltd, 1999, p 20.

and implementation. He was the fountainhead of all policy, particularly foreign and defence policy, which he made almost extemporaneously.²⁸ The ideas that shaped India's security doctrine during the Nehru era were; non-alignment with power blocks, anti-colonialism, Asian solidarity, no great power involvement in the sub-continent, the Himalayas as India's security perimeter and self-reliance in defence equipment.

Military power did not feature in Nehru's foreign policy calculus. He envisaged a free India secure against attack either by its geo-strategic position, its size or the balance of power.²⁹ Security was sought through non-alignment, the UN, Panchsheel and moral suasion.³⁰ Quarantining the sub-continent from great power interference was sought, while funding only a passive defence capability against Pakistan. Non alignment and disarmament were pursued as parts of foreign policy without relating them to the needs of a realistic defence policy that ought have called for deterrent power against both Pakistan and China. Pacifism had twisted India's strategic culture into all kinds of absurdities.³¹

The well entrenched bureaucracy further ensured that the administrative and organisational changes introduced in the politico-military-strategic set up after independence remained weak and ineffective.

The root of this strategic culture can be traced to the civilisational traits of India which did not try to subjugate or colonise other peoples and Indian history has been "the

²⁸ Jaswant Singh, 34.

²⁹ LJ Kavic, India's Quest for Security : Defence Policies 1947-65, University of California Press, 1967, 25.

³⁰ Verghese Koithara, Society, State and Security : The Indian Experience, New Delhi, Sage Publications 1999, p 97.

³¹ Jaswant Singh, Defending India, Bangalore, Mac Millan India Ltd, 1999, p 11.

history of continual social adjustment and not that of organized power for defence and aggression”.³²

Nevertheless, if Kagan’s claim, with regard to the change in American strategic culture that “now that the United States is powerful it behaves as powerful states do” is true, then it follows that strategic culture of nations can and does change. In the case of India it is certainly the case that the 1998 tests signaled a beginning in the transformation of its strategic culture. Conduct of these tests had been contemplated for nearly ten years by various governments, but had been put off for a variety of reasons, not least because of the unsatisfactory economic situation. These tests were necessary for political and technical reasons, but more than that they gave the government the confidence that it could exercise its strategic autonomy in areas of vital national interest without devastating international reprisals. They were certainly not meant to be a “badge” or a “trophy” to be worn on the shirt sleeve as dismissively suggested by Stephen Cohen.³³ They were a watershed of real transformation in India’s strategic culture from a pacifist, moralistic and idealistic orientation to a more realist and pragmatic world view.

Yet it is too early to conclude that this change is in itself sufficient to narrow the differences in US and Indian perception of the ‘new world order’. The Indian position continues to be guided by the view that the world cannot be held hostage to the sole super power no matter how benign or altruistic its motives. India remains wedded to the inalienable right of nation states to preserve and protect their sovereignty and abjures the self proclaimed right of states to use unilateral force without the mandate of the United

³² Rabindranath Tagore Nationalism in the West -Documents on Political Thought in Modern India Vol 2, Oxford University Press, Bombay 1976 ,p 702.

³³ Stephen Cohen, 87.

Nations. This position is, for Jacksonian United States, sheer anathema as the Iraq case has abundantly proven in the recent past.

It is unlikely that improvement in Indo-US strategic relations will be possible unless the perceptual gap in the strategic cultures is narrowed. On the other hand if there is a congruence of security and military interests of the two countries then an improved strategic relationship may be possible. An examination of the US relations with other Asian countries above has shown that as long as the security interests of these Asian countries and the United States remained convergent, American interest was kept alive despite obvious cultural differences e.g Korea and Japan. If, in addition, the strategic culture of the country in question, such as Australia, was similar to that of the US then the relationship gets cast in stone. The security interests of India and the US are therefore worthy of analysis in order to establish if they are convergent enough for establishing a robust strategic partnership despite the obvious strategic cultural differences.

SECURITY INTERESTS

Global terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are clearly the new security challenges facing the United States after the events of 9/11. In both cases India is a critical actor; as a victim of terrorism on the one hand and as a state with nuclear weapons on the other. The narrowing of the differences in these two critical security areas is probably one of the reasons for the dramatic turn around in Indo-US relations. Yet it would be too premature to conclude that these differences have narrowed to the point of inconsequence. As noted by Mr Kanwal Sibal, India's Foreign Secretary,

while addressing the Carnegie Endowment on 04 February 2003; “Although a deep and intense engagement in recent years has enlarged our understanding on security and non-proliferation issues, it has not completely resolved the outstanding differences”. In the short term at least US interest in overcoming both these challenges will cause it to be deeply involved in India. A detailed discussion, therefore, merits examination.

War on Terrorism

India has been the victim of terrorism for many years, but more so since the end of the cold war, especially in Kashmir and the Punjab. Unfortunately, successive US administrations tended to view this menace as a internal problem of India, a product of the India-Pakistan confrontation. The reason is not far to seek. Throughout the decade of the Afghan war against Soviet occupation, the CIA actively funded and tolerated the rise of the Taliban. Pakistan’s Inter Service Intelligence was the willing and eager agent not only to disburse these funds to the mujahideen but also for exercising complete local authority over the distribution of weapons and decision making on how the war was to be fought.³⁴ Another input that was vital to the operation was the use of narcotics to provide the non accountable funds for the conduct of the covert operations of this scale. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the question of dismantling the entire guerilla warfare enterprise naturally arose for the ISI. But strategists in Pakistan, with reason, decided instead to employ the Afghan formula in aiding and abetting insurgency in the Indian states of Punjab and Kashmir. The successes against the Soviets had emboldened the Pakistan leadership to experiment with that formula in these states. While the insurgency in the Punjab was eventually brought under control by mid 1990’s the Kashmir insurgency

³⁴ Jasjit Singh, Kargil 1999 Pakistan’s Fourth War for Kashmir The Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, 1999. 92

continued to boil and peaked in the summer of 1999 with the ill conceived and ham handedly executed incursion of the Pakistan Army regulars and mujahideen across the Line of Control in Kargil in northern Kashmir. India had thus been wounded by terrorism for nearly 15 years before the events of 9/11, but because those behind it were not seen as a threat to the USA or the Western countries the early signs were ignored.

Thus when the unimaginable tragedy of 9/11 struck the United States, Indian leaders were quick to sympathize with the American people. The Indian government decided to extend all cooperation to the US in its fight against global terrorism. In return the expectation was that the United States will, at the minimum, recognize the nature of the insurgency in Kashmir as a clear cut case of cross border terrorism sponsored by Pakistan. As events unfolded there was a daring but unsuccessful attack by terrorists on the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001. This event evoked substantial understanding of the Indian position that there can not be double standards in defining global terrorism; the one directed against the US being regarded as untarnished evil and therefore intolerable and the other directed against lesser countries being internal problems requiring the resolution of its root causes. Much hope was placed by the Indian leaders on the ability of the US to coerce Pakistan to stop its sponsorship of cross border terrorism once and for all. Nearly 18 months after 9/11 and 15 months after the attack on the Indian Parliament this has clearly not happened leading the Indian Prime Minister Mr AB Vajpayee to comment in anguish that the “the US and the UK did not have the power to force the hand of President Musharraf”.

To be fair the US administration has made reasonable effort to get Pakistan to end the sponsorship of terrorism directed toward India. As stated by Richard Haass, Director of

Policy Planning, DoS “We will continue to urge President Musharraf to do everything in his power to permanently end infiltration into Kashmir”.³⁵ Even Secretary Powell indirectly acknowledged the existence of Pakistan sponsored infiltration when he commented that “I think many people are watching activity that is occurring across the Line of Control to see whether the rate of that activity, if it went down, may be an encouraging step”.³⁶ Nonetheless the fact remains that because Pakistan, more specifically President Musharraf, is so indispensable to US efforts to eliminate the Al Quedia and Osama Bin Laden, it is willing to go easy on forcing Pakistan to end the cross border infiltration. It is in this context that the Indian Prime Minister was compelled to make the above remark.

Another facet of the ‘our terrorists’ and ‘their terrorists’ syndrome is that the US refuses to utter the “T” word in the India-Pakistan context, preferring to couch it in diplomatic double speak by using terms such as cross border ‘activity’, ‘infiltration’ etc. In his seminal work on the subject of terrorism, Bard E O’Neil defines it as a form of warfare (employed by insurgents) in which violence is directed primarily against non combatants, usually civilians, rather than operational military and police forces or economic assets.³⁷ By this definition at least it is clear that the insurgency in Kashmir is nothing but terrorism given that nearly 60,000 civilians including innocent pilgrims, children, women and politicians, have been brutally killed since the start of the insurgency in 1989. Pakistan’s clever argument, that the insurgency is a ‘freedom struggle’ and that the ‘actors’ are

³⁵ Outlook India TheUnited States and India – A Transformed Relationship”, Ambassador Richard Haass speaking to the Confederation of Indian Industry on 7 January 2003.

³⁶ Collin Powell Stop cross border terror for talks with India, US tells Pak, The Times of India, 30 January 2003

³⁷ Bard E O’Neil, Insurgency and Terrorism Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare, Brassey’s , Virginia 1990, 24.

‘freedom fighters’, is patently untenable based on yet another observation by Bard O’Neil about terrorism and freedom fighters. According to him the term freedom fighter has to do with the *ends* (e.g. secessionism) while terrorism connotes the *means*.³⁸ He further adds that if insurgent action meets the criteria of terrorism defined above then they are using terrorism as a form of warfare.

As things stand therefore there is a fundamental difference over what terrorism means to the United States and to India. Naturally this will manifest itself in the perception and approach each country has to dealing with this menace. Despite this difference the Indian government has offered unstinted support and cooperation to the US in its Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). For instance there is frequent consultation and intelligence sharing between the two countries on terrorist financing and terrorist groups. An FBI office has been opened in New Delhi and Indian Naval ships provided escort to US ships passing through the Malacca straits for few months in 2002.³⁹ Also the Indo-US Joint Working Group on anti-terrorism set up before 9/11 has been meeting frequently. At its fourth meeting in January 2002 the Group identified the following areas for future cooperation; joint investigation and intelligence sharing that includes radio intercepts; improving border management that would involve the Sandia National Laboratory and the use of different types of sensors to detect infiltration; a joint Indo-US initiative to counter the growing danger of cyber terrorism that would also deal with to internal security and ways to disrupt the funding of terrorist organizations.⁴⁰

³⁸ Bard E O’Neil , 27

³⁹ Outlook India, *ibid*.

⁴⁰ Atul Aneja , Focus on four key areas to fight terrorism, The Hindu, 20 January 2002

Yet reciprocation from the US side on India's concerns about terrorism emanating from Pakistan and directed against India has not been entirely satisfactory. Since 9/11 alone there have been four brutal, inhuman, and reprehensible terrorist strikes in India: first on 13 December 2001 a suicide attack on the Indian parliament, then the torching in Gujarat of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims in March 2002, followed by the slaying of 24 Hindu devotees in a temple in Gujarat in October 2002 and again the brutal hacking to death of Hindus in Kashmir in March 2003. After the latest bout of mayhem the Indian government has decided that it would take decisive action to demonstrate resolve. On March 27, following blunt private warnings from Indian officials that they were close to taking action against Pakistan, U.S. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw took time out from an Iraq war summit at Camp David to jointly urge Pakistan to "fulfill its commitments" to end militant incursions into Kashmir.⁴¹ Even Western diplomats in New Delhi and Islamabad concur with the India's concerns and have expressed dismay by what they regard as Musharraf's failure to fulfill the promise he made last spring to "permanently" end militant incursions into Kashmir.⁴² In an unusual public admission of ineffective US policy, Richard Haass, Director of Policy Planning of the US State Dept recently conceded that, "The United States now for some time has urged the Pakistani government to stop all infiltration across the Line of Control. I'll be honest: We have not succeeded, and we are at times, shall we say, disappointed and frustrated with that reality."⁴³

⁴¹ John Lancaster, Mulling Action, India Equates Pakistan-Iraq, Washington Post, April 11 2003, A20

⁴² Washington Post, April 11, 2003, A20

⁴³ Glenn Kessler, Pakistan Fails to Rein in Guerrillas, Washington Post, April 18, 2003, A 14.

Indian leaders know that the US has the means and the coercive power to make the crucial difference and understand the US dilemma of supporting the very regime that is also the supporter of terrorists. India is prepared to wait until the US achieves reasonable success in stamping out the Al Qaeda from its safe havens in Pakistan and Afghanistan. But there is a limit. India's complaint is that one cannot have one foot in the terrorist camp and both feet in the combat against it. The leader of the country whose right hand commits terrorist acts against India and the left hand co operates against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, one part of whose discourse is a rallying call in favour of terrorism against India and the other rallies against those who target the West, whose promises have no value because he has no value for them, cannot be reliable partner in the combat against terrorism.⁴⁴ It is not only in India's interest but also in the interest of the US to once and for all squarely call Pakistan's bluff in the fight against terrorism. Yet the United States fights shy of doing so. Frustrated with the cautious position taken by the Bush administration, the US ambassador to India Robert Blackwill finally resigned from his post on 20 April 2003.⁴⁵ In his 1,100 page statement he chafed at the Bush administration's coddling of Pakistan and its reluctance to take a stronger stand on Islamabad's brazen promotion of terrorism;

“As I have said many times during my stay in India, the fight against international terrorism will not be won until terrorism against India ends permanently. There can be no other legitimate stance by the United States, no American compromise whatever on this elemental geopolitical and moral truth. The United States and India and all civilized nations must have zero tolerance for terrorism. Otherwise we sink into a swamp of moral relativism and strategic myopia”.⁴⁶

The United States and India both have a common interest in the stability of Pakistan by nudging it away from supporting the pro jehadi elements that form part of its

⁴⁴ Speech by Mr Kapil Sibal . *ibid*.

⁴⁵ Chidanand Rajghatta, Blackwill Quits as US Envoy to India, Times of India, April 21, 2003.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

internal political structure. Both countries need to co ordinate their policies to address the larger aspects of international terrorism emanating from Pakistan. The critical importance of the co operation between India and the US on terrorism cannot be overstated because it embodies a mechanism to deepen the India-US relationship.

Nuclear Weapons Proliferation

The other security issue that is at the core of the Indo-US relations is nuclear proliferation. No other factor has been more instrumental in causing an estrangement in the relationships between the two countries. Both countries have established intractable positions on their respective view points on nuclear proliferation and are unwilling to make any concessions. The realization of the full potential of Indo-US strategic relations nevertheless hinges upon the successful resolution of these divergent positions. The major divergences that have existed between the two countries on nuclear and missile issues can be traced to India's Peaceful Nuclear Explosions (PNE) in 1974. How and why India was forced into taking this decision needs explanation.

In 1959, India had a notable lead over China in the nuclear field. During the decade of the 50s, above ground nuclear testing took place routinely around the world. But Nehru opposed all weapons of mass destruction. In 1964 when China had exploded its first nuclear device, Dr Homi Bhabha (India's first nuclear scientist) had declared that India could produce the nuclear bomb within 15 months (by early 1967).⁴⁷ Options for India were limited; either address the Chinese threat by going nuclear, or persist with global nuclear disarmament or remain non-nuclear and seek international guarantees. At this juncture, Prime Minister Shastri requested the British PM, Mr Harold Wilson for guarantees of an extended nuclear deterrence but did not receive a favourable response.

⁴⁷ Iyengar, Indian Express, 12 Mar 94.

Thus, in spite of the 1962 debacle, the 1964 Chinese nuclear explosions and the British refusal on an extended nuclear deterrence; Shastri did not opt for a nuclear programme. Although therefore, the scientific community was ready for many years to carry out a peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) it was only in 1974 that the first PNE was authorised by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in the face of intimidation by the US in 1971, when the USS Enterprise Task Force was dispatched to the Indian Ocean during the Bangladesh War.

The tests by India hastened the establishment of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (1974) and the enactment of the US Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act (1978).⁴⁸ US policy to persuade India to abandon its nuclear option has varied over the years, ranging from coercing India to join the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to accepting ‘full scope safeguards’ over its entire nuclear programme, to ‘capping, rolling back and eliminating’ its nuclear capabilities, to joining the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). None of these achieved any concrete results. In general, US policy can be described as variations of the single over-arching theme of shutting out any aspiring entrant from the nuclear club, and withholding technology and materials that could be used to produce nuclear weapons. Within this broad framework there has been room for play to suit the predilections of the individual Presidents.

President Bush has however been different in his approach to this vexed issue. Firstly the Bush administration is clearly indifferent to the future of either the CTBT or the Fissile Material Cut off Treaty (FMCT). Secondly it has not insisted that India ‘roll back’ its nuclear programme although it definitely wants a ‘cap’ on the deployment on further nuclear weapons. Thirdly the administration appears to be taking a relaxed view on the

⁴⁸ PR Chari, India-US Relations Promoting Synergy, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, 21 January 2003, 14.

technology transfers, especially in regard to safety and ancillary equipment. The US has only made proforma objections to Russia's transfer of two 1000 MW VVER atomic reactors to India. It will also not object to Russia supplying cryogenic engines for India's space related Geo-Stationery Launch Vehicle (GSLV) programme, provided the related technology is not transferred.⁴⁹

Despite the Bush administration being less aggressive in demanding the rolling back, capping and elimination of India's nuclear weapon capability, it has by no means abandoned the effort. On the other hand, of the three nuclear positions that were possible by India i.e. *pragmatic, maximalist, and rejectionist*⁵⁰, the pragmatists seem to have won the day. Pragmatists believe that the tests have enhanced India's international status. They argue for a minimum deterrent, the limited deployment of nuclear weapons, caps on programmes, the de-mating of warhead and delivery systems and the declaration of no-first-use policy. In their opinion the primary threat to India comes from Pakistan and China, but they also believe that a limited capability is needed to deter extra regional powers from meddling in South Asia. They view the nuclear programme as exceptional; autonomous in its technology, superior in its morality (because of self imposed restraints on the development and the deployment of nuclear weapons), and strategically sophisticated.⁵¹

By all indications it does not appear that India's nuclear weaponisation programme will be rolled back, much less eliminated. At best a cap may be possible, but even that is subject to numerous conditions. On the other hand, the US remains unmoved by India's concern and need for developing nuclear capability. The Bush administration's National

⁴⁹ PR Chari, 15.

⁵⁰ Stephen Cohen, 183

⁵¹ Stephen Cohen, 182.

Security Strategy document clearly acknowledges that the ‘differences remain, including over the development of India’s nuclear and missile programmes’. At the same time the document expresses hope that ‘through a strong partnership with India, we can best address any differences and shape a dynamic future’. The future of Indo-US strategic relations balances precariously on the edge of nuclear differences. Only a spirit of accommodation by both sides for the genuine concerns of the other can lead to improvement in the situation. To begin with, India must, as a responsible and mature nation, address US concerns by establishing iron clad procedures to prevent proliferation of nuclear technologies to other aspirants. This should not be difficult since no national interest will be served by indulging in proliferation. A beginning in this regard already appears to have been made with the passage of legislation for export control of nuclear and missile technology. Equally the US must also understand India’s need for the development of a minimum credible nuclear capability in the security situation that obtains in the sub-continent. Also the US must abandon its unrealistic policy of demanding the India roll back its nuclear programme. A paper by the Institute of National Security Studies (INSS) recently concluded that the prospect for the roll back of India’s nuclear programme is “virtually nil. The United States should realize that rollback is no longer an option”.

Military, Space And High Technology

Undoubtedly, the strategic area of greatest forward movement has been the military to military cooperation between the two countries. This improvement appears dramatic because it was almost non existent before this period. The roots of this go back to the Nehru era. Nehru concluded that there was a connection between the military takeovers in Pakistan and it’s alliance with the US. Fearful that the ‘military coup virus’ that plagued

Pakistan, might spread to India, he, at the behest of his advisers, desired that military-to-military ties with the US be minimal.⁵² This fear has only recently begun to wane, due to the growing confidence of the politicians and bureaucrats in the capabilities and the power of the Indian state.

Little wonder then that mil-to-mil cooperation between the two states gathered momentum only after the sanctions imposed after the 1998 nuclear tests were lifted. The US has nevertheless always shown keen desire to engage with the military establishment. The first initiative was taken by the US twelve years ago in the form of the Kicklighter proposals. A few months after the first Gulf War, a former Commander of the US army in the Pacific, Claude Kicklighter, brought forth a proposal to augment the level of Indo-US defence co operation in April 1991. The Kicklighter proposals envisaged an enhanced level of military to military co operation through joint seminars, training and the establishment of steering committees. As a result three such committees, one each for the Army, Navy and the Air Force were set up. Since then the most concrete and visible defence co operation between the two countries was reflected in the naval exercises (named Malabar) that were conducted in 1992, 1994 and 1995. Exercises between the two Armies and Special Forces were also conducted albeit these were very basic level exercises. However this cooperation did not see the kind of momentum that was anticipated, and the regular conduct of exercises was discontinued thereafter for reasons still unclear. The 1998 nuclear tests by India sent the nascent relations into a freeze but these were revived once again in 2002 after the sanctions were lifted.

The year 2002 has been a watershed of sorts in Indo-US military to military relations as the depth and breadth of joint military exercises increased significantly. The

⁵² Stephen Cohen , 77.

two navies not only revived the stalled Malabar series of exercises but also went a step further and cooperated in the conduct of escort operations in the Malacca straits where IN ships escorted US naval ships. This was a first of sorts since the Indian Navy has scarcely, if ever, participated in joint operations with foreign navies after the 1960s. Further, the Indian Army and the Air Force participated in an airborne operations exercise in Alaska while the US Army airborne forces reciprocated in a similar exercise in Agra. The special forces of the two countries also carried out joint exercises. In August 2003 the two Air Forces will participate in air-to-air combat tactical exercises in Agra where the Indian Air Force and the USAF will field the MiG 29 and the F 15 respectively.⁵³ At about the same time the SEALs and the Marine Commandos of the Indian Navy will participate in exercises on the west coast of India with the intention of learning each others operating procedures, training techniques, weapons and equipment⁵⁴

The military co operation is also expanding into joint peacekeeping. For example in February 2003 the two countries were involved in a two week peace keeping exercise “Shanti Path 03” (meaning Peace Path 03). The aim of the exercise, involving 150 personnel from the US, India and 11 other nations, was to familiarize the participants with the techniques and principles of peacekeeping in a multilateral environment.⁵⁵

Nevertheless it must not be concluded that regular conduct of exercises and progression to joint operations are by themselves indicators of a ‘strategic’ partnership. It is no secret that the US armed forces scarcely stand to gain in any way by exercising with the Indian armed forces given, not only the technological asymmetry of the two forces but also the differences in standards and procedures and doctrines. Conducting joint

⁵³ Saikat Dutta, India, US to Talk Army Co operation, Indian Express, January 31 2003.

⁵⁴ Rajat Pandit, US, Indian Marines to Hold Joint Exercises, The Times of India, March 12 2003

⁵⁵ Indo –US Peacekeeping Exercise The Times of India, February 11 2003.

exercises with armed forces of allies and friends is a standard policy of the United States government. Understandably the scope, content and complexity of the exercises that it conducts with its long standing allies viz NATO, Japan, Korea and Australia are an order of magnitude higher than the joint exercises with Indian armed forces. The Indian armed forces nevertheless definitely benefit by exposure to not only the procedures and technology but also by the professional interaction with US personnel.

It would be too naïve to believe that the US would indulge in such a frivolous activity for no benefit to itself. The two countries are not bound together by any defence treaty or cooperation. Therefore, even if, hypothetically, the military to military co operation finally matures to the standard expected of allies of the US, the employment of the two forces in joint operations is very unlikely, absent any defence cooperation treaty. The real reason for the United States to keep itself militarily engaged with the Indian armed forces lies not at the tactical or operational but at the grand strategic level whose contours are shaped and defined in the short term by the ‘defuse-the-conflict-with-Pakistan’ concern and in the long term by the ‘China factor’ and need to obtain a *sure* footprint in the ‘arc of instability’ extending from Israel to Korea. A recently published ‘classified’ report prepared by Booz ,Allen and Hamilton for the Office of Net Assessment, DoD, concludes that military planners in the US are thinking about “different sets of allies and friends for addressing a future strategic environment in Asia that may be dramatically different from today. For many, India is the most attractive alternative. For this reason several Americans underscored that eventual access to Indian military infrastructure

represents a critical strategic hedge against dramatic changes in traditional US relationships in Asia”.⁵⁶ The report also quotes a US naval source as follows;

“The US Navy wants a relatively neutral territory on the opposite side of the world the can provide ports and support for the operations in the Middle East. India not only has a good infrastructure, the Indian Navy has proved that it can fix and fuel US ships. Over time, port visits must become a natural event. India is a viable player in supporting all naval missions, including escorting and responding to regional crises. In the same vein the US Air Force would like the Indians to be able to grant them access to bases and landing rights during operations, such as counter terrorism and heavy airlift support”

Even more than the joint exercises, India is keen to have access to a variety of defence technologies that the US industry has to offer. India has sought US technology for both, the indigenous manufacture and outright purchase of equipment such as aero engines for the state of the art Light Combat Aircraft, Advanced Jet Trainer and helicopters, battle field gun locating radars, early warning systems and maritime patrol aircraft.⁵⁷ Besides India has sought to purchase the Arrow anti ballistic SAM and the Phalcon airborne early warning radar from Israel.⁵⁸ India’s complaint so far has been that the US is less than enthusiastic to the sale of these items and technologies and that the US has in the past been an unreliable supplier, using the sanctions route to disrupt the sale of even innocuous items of outdated equipment such as spares for the Sea King and Sea Harrier aircraft purchased from the United Kingdom. To be fair the US is willing to crank up export of high-tech equipment to India but only after instituting mechanisms to ensure that dual-use items meant for civilian use cannot be diverted for nuclear or missile programmes. Washington believes that India needs to offer guarantees about end use, tighten its export

⁵⁶ Josy Joseph, Target Next: Indian Military Bases India Abroad, April 21, 2003

⁵⁷ India to US – Set Time Frame on Sale of Technology Times of India, December 13, 2002.

⁵⁸ Indo –US Defence Talks may Focus on Arrow, Times of India, January 06, 2003.

controls (of sensitive technologies) and institute a regulatory environment. New Delhi wants “efficiency, continuity, stability and transparency in the American export license application process and the widest possible access to dual use items.”⁵⁹ Indians place technology transfer as the touchstone of any new found strategic relationship and every thing revolves around a strong US commitment to share its technologies. As one senior Indian policy maker summed it up: “If the US is willing to share dual use technologies, then it suggests that the US regards India as a partner that shares strategic concerns and burdens. If the US denies access to dual use technology, then it gives the impression that India is not accepted or trusted”.

The greatest test of the growing relationship however lies in the ability of the US side to treat the Indians as ‘equals’. Indians are unlikely to accept the standard patronizing attitude of the Americans that they are so routinely used to in dealing with other smaller countries. Four broad points where this equality should be visible are; norms that govern interactions between two sovereign states must be applied; US technology transfer policy should treat India as a friend; a symbiotic relationship that connects the Indian military with the infrastructure in the continental US; and sensitivity to Indian concerns.

If there is yet another evidence of a maturing strategic partnership it is in the field of co operation in high technology. The Statement of Principles for Indo-US High Technology Commerce was signed by the two countries in February 2003. This new agreement addresses all issues concerning space, high technology and civilian nuclear technology. Trade in these areas is sought to be facilitated by addressing systemic barriers, generating market awareness, conducting industry outreach programmes, reviewing policies and processes on export of dual use goods and technologies and pursuing export

⁵⁹ Chidanand Rajghatta US Opens Hi Tech Tap to India Times of India, February 06, 2003.

control co operation.⁶⁰ At the signing ceremony of this agreement the interlocutors commented that the agreement “places our technology trade in an entirely new foundation which is consistent with the new strategic partnership and reflects an environment of trust and confidence”.⁶¹ The agreement will seek to remove the apprehension of American companies about the tariff and non tariff barriers in India and will likewise assure the Indian companies about misperceived restrictions of the US markets.

Despite the positive and optimistic sentiments expressed by the two sides, it is too premature to jump to the conclusion that the latest and best technologies will start to flow into India. Not even the UK, or even Israel, the two long standing allies of the US enjoy this privilege. The technology spigot will be opened to India only slowly and that too when and if India meets certain conditions of ‘good behaviour’ in the two areas of deepest concern to the US namely, prevention of conflict with Pakistan and nuclear proliferation. In other words India will have to sacrifice its freedom of independent decision making in these strategic areas in order to oblige the US to continue to keep open the technology tap. It is a trade off between freedom of decision making and acquisition of high technology.

Stephen Cohen has rightly concluded that “India will continue to see American power as essentially constraining if it is not totally supportive”.⁶²

India, Pakistan and Kashmir

It is often forgotten that Britain is the common party, and hence morally responsible for, the three major sources of tension and conflict east of the Suez. Namely the Kashmir problem, the Israel-Palestine issue and the Iraq-Kuwait-Kurdish problem. All

⁶⁰ US, India to Boost hi-tech trade, Times of India, February 06, 2003.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Stephen Cohen, 155

these problems were created, quite literally by the stroke of the (British cartographer's) pen, where none existed. The borders of Iraq and Kuwait (and Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon) were *arbitrarily* drawn by British officers post WW I following the mandate of the League of Nations. This created the Iraq-Kuwait and the Israel-Palestine problem. Likewise they also laid the foundation for the India-Pakistan conflicts when Britain hastily withdrew from the sub continent without fully resolving the issue of accession of Kashmir.

Various US administrations have tried to deal with the Kashmir issue as though it were a mere territorial dispute. More than that they have sided with Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, if not openly, than at least covertly, from 1947 till 1999. This policy alone was responsible for India, albeit reluctantly, to be pushed into the Soviet sphere of influence, because in the cold calculations of the various Indian leaders, the Soviet Union with its veto power alone could ensure that Pakistan under American patronage could not get away with its Kashmir designs. Even Stephen Cohen admits that “the US Pakistan alliance is widely believed to have militarized Pakistani politics and foreign policy through the connection between the Pakistan Army and the United States, making it impossible for Delhi to come to accommodation with Islamabad over Kashmir”.⁶³ As an Australian writer candidly commented, “the West has collectively made a mess of its policy towards India, partly because of its foolish cold war bias to Pakistan”.⁶⁴ Even so, as alluded to earlier, the 1998 nuclear tests became a defining turning point in Indo US relations when the pro-Pakistan focus of the American policy establishment began to right itself. But more than the ‘Nuclear Winter’ scenario of 1998 it was the ‘Kargil Spring’ of 1999 that led to the

⁶³ Stephen Cohen, 202.

⁶⁴ Greg Sheridan, It is time for the West to Turn Away from Pakistan” The Australian, (reproduced in the Pioneer), July 15 1999. p 10.

clear abandonment of the even handedness, and even a pro India tilt, in the American policy circles.⁶⁵

In May 1999 President Musharraf (then the Pakistan Army chief) unwittingly created a serious international crisis when he embarked upon his Kargil misadventure in northern Kashmir by ordering the Pakistan Army regulars and irregulars to occupy territory on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC). The Pakistani strategic aims for the intrusions had multiple dimensions: shift the LoC eastwards to gain territorial advantage, cut off the Ladakh and Siachen through interdiction of India's communications jugular in this remote region, internationalise Kashmir and provide a new fillip to the dying insurgency in Kashmir.⁶⁶ In a marked departure from the decades-long even handedness toward India and Pakistan, if not outright tilt towards the latter, the United States for once took a position that was unequivocally in favour of India. The initial reaction of the American side was to equate India and Pakistan in urging mutual restraint. But as the Indian armed forces began their counteroffensive to vacate the aggression, the shift in the American position became more marked. Not only the Clinton Administration but even the mainstream American press, that is known to be critical of *every thing that India does, or does not do*, displayed a rare change of position. For example the New York Times in its editorial of May 27 1999 conceded that "India has been right to demand the withdrawal of the militants before any further negotiations on Kashmir". The Washington Post also moved away from the tedious even-handedness that is endemic in the US when discussing Indo-Pak issues. "This time around the Pakistanis are clearly to blame for having started the fighting", it said in its June 28, 1999 editorial.

⁶⁵ Jasjit Singh, 199.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 195.

Even then it would be the height of naiveté for India to believe that there has been a paradigmatic shift in US policy toward India when the support has been Kargil specific. Therein lies the rub. All Indians, whether politicians, government servants, military personnel, civilians, academicians, strategists and the ordinary man on the street truly and sincerely believe that Kashmir is an inalienable part of India. They cannot understand how the United States can side with Pakistan over this irrefutable Indian claim that is quite simply uncontestable whether legally, morally or historically. The even handed approach that the United States continues to take on this issue only causes disenchantment and fuels suspicion of US motives in *all other fields* of Indo-US relations. In fact most Indians express deep consternation over the fact that the average American views every thing in the Indian sub continent through the Kashmir and nuclear proliferation prism. Even worse is that India and Pakistan are considered as hyphenated countries; *India-Pakistan*, as though mention of one without the other would be suggestive of a tilt in the other's favour. This is interpreted by most Indians as yet another, puerile and unsophisticated, exhibition of American understanding of an otherwise complex security dynamic of the sub continent.

There is no doubt that the US is in a dilemma over the question of how to deal with the two countries without alienating either one. The US desires to balance its policies, wants to maximize the outcome, without letting it become a 'zero sum'. This is difficult if not impossible. India because of its vast strategic and economic potential surely is in a different league all together. Pakistan, in contrast, is faced with far greater and more complex challenges; internal radicalization, economic stagnation and political decay. Ashley Tellis from the RAND corporation has suggested that there are four possible

policy choices available to the US: ignore both countries; increase support to Pakistan to provide a de facto balance against India; increase support to India and contain Pakistan; and lastly pursue a differentiated policy of deepened engagement with India and a ‘soft landing’ with Pakistan⁶⁷. He goes on to recommend the last choice.

In fact the Bush administration’s National Security Strategy clearly suggests that it has “undertaken a transformation in its bilateral relationship with India based on the conviction that US interests require a strong relationship with India”.⁶⁸ This declaration is a statement of intent but is predicated on the premise that the Indo-Pak face off is once and for all resolved. The near term goal of the US is to avert a possible nuclear war in the sub continent. The Kargil episode was a demonstration of that possibility. The dilemma for the US is how to deal with either country in the most effective way without seeming to be too pro one country or the other, since any such perception may exacerbate, rather than improve the delicate situation.

Pakistan’s invaluable (for the US) contribution to the apprehension of Al Qaeda operatives has emboldened the US. For this the US has ‘rewarded’ Pakistan in several ways. Lifting of sanctions, increasing the textile quotas for Pakistani garment exporters to the US and most recently assurances from both Powell and Gen. Tommy R. Franks that Pakistan will get a piece of the reconstruction business in Iraq in the form of supplying labor and some construction material, especially cement.⁶⁹ The quid pro quo continues unabated. The US has now obtained a long term military toe hold in Pakistan. This arrangement serves both countries just fine. The US can, by its physical presence, keep

⁶⁷ Ashley Tellis, <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1306.1/MR1306.1.sec3.pdf> (Mar 30, 2003)

⁶⁸ The United States of America, National Security Strategy, September 2002, p 27

⁶⁹ John Lancaster, Mulling Action India Equates Iraq, Pakistan, Washington Post, April 11 2003, A20.

pressuring Pakistan to cooperate in its quest to hunt down the terrorists while the same presence also guarantees the continuation of President Musharraf in office. In the bargain it can, again by its sheer physical military presence, hope to dissuade India and avert a possible conflict.

With Pakistan, physical occupation of real estate was easy. With India such a prospect is next to impossible given political objections that would be raised in an open democratic society, especially since no political party, or the population in general, is as yet convinced of American support for India on the crucial Kashmir issue. 'Engagement' was a better, less intrusive option. With one stroke, two objectives would be achieved. One, India would see such a move as an acknowledgement of the 'great power' status that it craves and secondly it would give the administration a handle and lever to influence the Indian political leaders. The more involved the US becomes in Indian political affairs the further the specter of war would recede. In time the India and Pakistan would move towards a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute, without the US having to play a mediatory role that India flatly rejects (but which Pakistan dearly seeks).

Unfortunately, the US is quite off the mark in its quest for a solution to the Indo-Pak conundrum. Firstly, because various administrations treat this problem as another 'private squabble' between two 'juvenile neighbours' seeking to out bid the other in 'jingoist recalcitrance'. Secondly, Americans have long got accustomed to dealing with paired minority conflicts where one or both of the belligerents welcome American arbitration as obedient 'supplicants'. The American approach has been to strike a 'deal' in resolving such intractable security problems. The Israel-Egypt Camp David accords are one such example where the deal was struck, in part because of the enormous military aid

that was promised, and delivered, to both countries. The India Pakistan situation is completely different. Pakistan has approached, and continues to approach, the US as an obedient ‘suppliant’, as revealed by the statement of Mr Shaukat Aziz Pakistan’s financial advisor to the Prime Minister; “ We need budgetary support and new grants from the US government besides increase in the annual assistance under USAID programme”.⁷⁰ This is in addition to the one billion dollar debt write off and debt relief that Pakistan has sought from the US. On the other hand no Indian leader will do so. The pride, independent streak, moral high ground position of the Indian leaders prevents them from dismounting from their ‘we-don’t-need-American-aid’ high horse. No deal making is possible in such circumstances. Indian ‘strategic culture’ looks down upon deals as immoral and not worthy of India’s principled, respected and proud heritage. Therefore, Indian leaders have always rejected, and will continue to reject, even so much as a benign ‘facilitation’ by the US in resolution of the Kashmir issue. Arbitration or mediation is simply out of the question.

In any case Indian leaders feel that they have done their bit, at least up till the events of 9/11, to address the Indo-Pak relations. They feel betrayed and let down by Pakistan when it rebuffed several *genuine* peace initiatives by India in the recent past. Firstly Prime Minister AB Vajpayee felt betrayed by the Kargil intrusions in April 1999 because they took place even as he was undertaking the famous Lahore bus peace trip. Therefore as far as India is concerned, this well meaning peace move was spurned by Pakistan. Secondly, General Musharraf the architect of Kargil is today the President (for life?) of Pakistan, a position he usurped by means far from democratic. The political leaders of India are wary, cautious and even suspicious of the sincerity of the Pakistan

⁷⁰ Press Trust of India [Iraq and Kashmir are not Comparable](#), Indian Express, April 08, 2003.

Army leadership. Thirdly, the continued support of cross border terrorism sponsored by Pakistan, not only in Kashmir but also in the other states of India with the larger intention of polarizing India's pluralistic society, is viewed as nothing short of a war by other means. The Indian leadership has lost all patience and is simply tired of the lecturing, sermonizing and hectoring by the US to 'exercise restraint'. In the face of the grave security challenges that face India they are well within their rights to ask the US to lean more heavily on Pakistan to stop its anti India policies. Failing that they have repeatedly stated that the patience will some day run thin. What appears even more galling to India is that while the US views it well within its right pursue its 'preemptive strategy' in Iraq, India cannot claim the same right with regard to the terrorism emanating from Pakistan and directed against India.⁷¹ The US sometimes forgets that pre-emption against a possible imminent threat to security remains an universally accepted fundamental right for self-defence. If the US can wage war against Iraq because it felt that its own security was threatened by Saddam Hussein's regime, then surely India has greater justification to use force against an ongoing war waged against it for two decades. That India has not opted to respond with force across its borders has less to do with India's inherent right and more to do with India's policy of restraint. Even as the Kashmir pot continued to boil it is commendable that the state went through its elections in October 2002. The free and fair elections, declared as such by international observers including American embassy officials, ousted the incumbent party with the opposition party now in power. The BJP government has also appointed a federal government interlocutor to embrace all parties in Kashmir in a meaningful dialogue. This has been welcomed by Asst Sec of State Christina Rocca in her

⁷¹ Press Trust of India Iraq and Kashmir are not Comparable, Indian Express, April 08, 2003.

testimony to the Sub Committee on Asia and the Pacific on March 20, 2003.⁷² In the same testimony she also observed that “Last summer’s election made it clear that the people of Kashmir want to pursue a path of peace”.

India’s difficulty in addressing the Kashmir issue has no doubt been compounded by Pakistan’s intransigence but unfortunately this has seriously impacted the Indo-US relations as well. The root cause of the political difficulties besetting Indo-US relations can be found in the clash over national security issues of major importance to each country. For India, the principal stumbling block has been the US-Pakistan relationship.....for the US the decisive problem was India’s attitude towards the Soviet Union.⁷³ Obviously the latter issue is no longer an irritant, but the former remains. If the United States is genuine and serious about Indo-US strategic relations it must take a hard look at its relations with Pakistan.

It would be sanguine to imagine that Pakistan will simply drop off the US radar scope. The US will continue to deal with Pakistan as long as it is in its best national security interests to do so. There is nothing surprising about this. But then if the US is not prepared to call a spade a spade and lean on Pakistan to stop all cross border terrorism, India too will continue to act in accordance with its own narrow, cold, calculated, self centered national interest by refusing to take any further steps towards peace.

Much is at stake for all the three countries if the deadlock over the issue of cross border terrorism is not resolved. It is quite clear where the onus of resolving the deadlock lies.

⁷² US Calls for Ending Infiltration in Kashmir, Times of India, March 21, 2003.

⁷³ Dennis Kux, Estranged Democracies: India and the United States 1941-1991 New Delhi , Sage Publications, 1994. 447-48.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The security dimension of the Indo-US relations revolves around the three interrelated issues of terrorism, proliferation and Kashmir. The United States and India have differences of perception on all of these issues. Progress has been made in reducing the differences but permanent resolution is still not in sight. These are essentially politico-military challenges, requiring greater political maturity by both sides for their ultimate resolution. Yet the approach has been indirect and surprisingly militaristic in dimension. This is being sought to be achieved by increasing the military-to-military engagement with the hope, by the US administration, that greater interaction by itself would lead to a narrowing of differences and finally resolution. This is a fallacious expectation given that the Indian armed forces do not have a deterministic role in strategic decision making in India. Similarly another fallacy of the US administration is that expanded and interdependent economic ties between the two countries will *some how* lead to an improvement in the security situation of the sub continent.

This is expected to work in two planes; firstly it hinges on the belief that increased business, commerce and trade linkages between the two countries will evolve to a level where interest groups from these communities in both countries will bring to bear pressure on the Indian government to avert a conflict fearing loss of their business advantages. But any such expectation is too optimistic. When it comes to matters

concerning Pakistan, the politically influential Indian community in America will unequivocally support the Indian government, although they may oppose it and be critical of it on several other issues.⁷⁴ Secondly it is believed that increasing economic activity between the US and India would wean Indian leaders away from their stereotypical approaches to security issues as well. This may be partially true but it is unlikely to have such an overpowering influence because no great economic loss is likely to be suffered by India even if the security situation in the sub continent remains unchanged or deteriorates. To substantiate this claim it is often pointed out that even with the serious internal security challenges facing India since 1989 the Indian economy has been resilient enough to grow at an average 6 to 7 % in the last decade of the 20 century. In fact it is precisely during this period that the economy has consolidated its position as the fourth largest in the world in PPP terms according to the April 2003 World Development Indicators released by the World Bank.⁷⁵ The Indian economy is now \$ 2913 billion in PPP terms behind USA (\$ 9781 bn PPP), China (\$5027 bn PPP) and Japan (3246 bn PPP).⁷⁶ On the contrary it is Pakistan with a GNP of \$ 213 bn PPP that is far more vulnerable to the internal security challenges facing it. In short the United States does not hold any effective economic lever in respect of India that it could wield in order to arrest a deteriorating security situation in future. The Indo-US economic interdependence is miniscule in comparison to that between the US and Europe, China or Japan.

Indo-US trade statistics for the year 2002 are placed at Appendix A. These figures clearly suggest that the size of the economic interaction is insignificant. They are no doubt

⁷⁴ Stephen Cohen, 291.

⁷⁵ India World's Fourth Largest Economy, Times of India, April 13 2003.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

improving as indicated by the figures for merchandise exports (excluding services exports) from India to USA which grew by +21.4% in 2002 compared to 2001, rising from \$9.74 billion to \$11.82 billion. This strong performance reflects the highest annual percentage growth in Indian exports to USA over the past decade. This has occurred against a backdrop of lackluster growth in worldwide exports to USA in 2002, and *despite concerns over trading with India due to heightened tensions in the subcontinent and travel advisories against visiting India that were briefly in place during mid 2002.*⁷⁷ The inference is that trade and commerce will generate a momentum of their own, irrespective of the security situation. Consequently it would not be incorrect to observe that commercial relations between the countries are unlikely to significantly impact the strategic nature of the relations.

As far as the Foreign Direct Investment is concerned the graph in Appendix B is revealing. American FDI in India is insignificant compared to its investments in China. Even this investment plunged dramatically (see graph) after 1998 as a result of the sanctions after the nuclear tests. The conclusion is that only events that lead to a severe strain in the strategic relationship necessitating imposition of sanctions will have an economic impact. In other words, only a robust and resilient strategic relationship will provide the environment for the economic relations to grow.

Indo US economic relations are not as robust as the potential would dictate, not because of the security environment, but because of other, mostly infrastructural, problems. These are inadequate roads, ports, power, telecommunications and transport for which government funding is not forthcoming because of high federal and state fiscal

⁷⁷ <http://www.indianembassy.org/press-release/2003/mar/04.htm> (April 10, 2003)

deficits amounting to nearly 10 % of the GDP. In addition the problems of a deeply entrenched bureaucracy, outdated regulations, sticky legal wickets and parochial political prejudices add up to dampen the growth of a dynamic Indo-US economic relationship. American capital is, according to Secretary of State Collin Powell, a coward. It flows to where it gets the best return and steers clear of places where the environment is not hospitable to profit.⁷⁸ Capital seeks opportunity, stability and transparency. Clearly India will have to take steps to remove concerns that drive capital away to other less burdensome investment climates.

And steps are being taken. For example in the month of April 2003, the Indian parliament passed the much delayed 'Electricity Bill' after nearly 127 amendments and a two year debate. The Bill pushes power reforms through three radical measures: competition in power distribution through an open access system; extension of the scope of captive power generation to co operatives and associations; and forcing State Electricity Utilities to unbundle their three functions – power generation, transmission and distribution. There is now hope that power sector reforms, which have been the single biggest failure since the reforms process began in 1990, will now be firmly behind the back. Simultaneously, other infrastructure problems are being addressed, albeit only at the pace that a parliamentary democratic system will allow. The ambitious National Highways project, expected to be completed in 2004, will connect the major cities of India by 15, 000 km of modern four lane highways. Likewise the telecommunications sector has shown rapid growth, one of the fastest in the world. Infrastructure will take time to develop in a large country like India, but it will finally happen.

⁷⁸ Richard Hass The United States and India: A Transformed Relationship Outlook India, January 08, 2003.

The US State Dept has recommended that India should address three areas of concern immediately if it wants to see a more robust economic partnership. These are elimination or reduction of tariff barriers, streamlining taxation and licensing requirement and Intellectual Property Rights. These measures will, according to Ambassador Richard Haass, Director of Policy Planning in the Dept of State, ‘go far in removing the obstacles to trade and investment’.⁷⁹ None of these concerns have any thing to do with infrastructure per se. In any case these are WTO issues and are more multilateral than bilateral in scope. To be sure India will proceed on these issues keeping its own domestic political compulsions in mind, much as the Western countries would. Mr Tarun Das the Director General of the Confederation of Indian Industries candidly commented that;

“The interesting aside is that we agree on the ‘market opening’ concept but we have to do it at a speed which suits our country. Not at a speed which suits others. The ‘roads’ in India are at a different level of development and the speed of traffic has to be lower than what prevails abroad on the autobahns of Europe or the expressways of USA if we are to avoid major accidents! As we have entered the 21st century we find a phenomenon which is new, growing, peculiar and inconsistent. While India is still being lectured on rapid-fire market access, the EU and USA are denying market access to our products and recently, even services. Bed linen is a classic example of the ways and means adopted by developed economies to stop our products from having markets in Europe and USA. The steel quota and tariff initiative of the US, the US Farm Bill, the EU Non-Tariff Barriers on food and agri-exports from India, are all examples of this contradiction. The issue now is that domestic political compulsions in the developed world are driving their trade policy and, clearly, they are moving away from practicing what they preach.”⁸⁰

The sum total of all of the above problems leads to a difficult-to-quantify problem of ‘image’. The Enron power project at Dhabol unfairly captures the imagination of American businesses about India. Dhabol was basically a metaphor of a flawed policy that in effect placed ‘foreign investment at any cost’ on a pedestal. The project was badly negotiated, but its negative impact arises from the belief engendered abroad that governments in India can fudge sovereign guarantees to wriggle out of contractual

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Tarun Das, Getting into Bed Linen, Indian Express, April 17, 2003.

obligations. But one swallow does not a summer make. There are many success stories, especially in the automobile manufacturing sector, pharmaceutical sector and of course the software sector that belie the problems of Dhabol.

There is no doubt that it is imperative for India to reform its internal economic, financial and governance processes, essential not only for the sake of the Indian economy but also to improve economic co operation with the US and other developed countries. But the fact remains that Indo US economic cooperation will not drive the strategic partnership. Business interests are driven more by profit motives not strategic concerns. No wonder then that despite China and the US having hardly any strategic interests that converge, there is still a booming trade and economic interaction between the two countries. One is not dependent on the other. However such a relationship is at best a 'relationship of convenience'. Absent the commercial, economic and trade interests, the relationship is likely to falter. On the contrary the opposite is not true. Economic, trade and commercial relations between the US and Korea, Japan and Australia have developed to the present levels because of the solid foundation of the strategic convergence of interests between these countries. Although the ties that bind these countries are different, e.g containment of communism (in Korea), preventing the re emergence of a hegemon (in Japan), and strategic culture (in Australia), they are none the less convergent strategic interests. There is no denying the fact that these countries achieved spectacular economic success because of these unwavering strategic bonds. And despite the periodic differences over economic issues, especially between Japan and the US, the question of a faltering relationship simply does not arise. None the less it cannot be overemphasized that an India that is an economic heavy weight would be a stabilising force in Asia and only strong economic ties

between India and the US can sustain an enduring strategic relationship and insulate the relationship from political change in either country or future disagreement on strategic issues.

THE WAY FORWARD

The differences in security interests between the two countries are not so insignificant that they can be dismissed out of hand. Even the strategic cultures are divergent. Is it still possible for the two countries to move ahead towards a deeper strategic engagement despite these obvious differences? The prospect is difficult but can be managed.

First, of all there is a need to build trust. During the first few years the two countries will have to go through the difficult and awkward process of learning each others idiosyncrasies and preferences with the aim of building trust. India will consider the relationship moving towards a strategic partnership if the US parts with the technology that India seeks. The US will view the efforts as successful if it is able to build a constructive military co operation programme with India leading to joint military operations. The navies of the two countries are best positioned to move forward because the US Navy, unlike the Air Force or the Army leaves no foot print on Indian soil. Naval exercises and operations are conducted away from the inquisitive gaze of the media and groups having vested agendas.

Secondly, the defence bureaucracy in the Pentagon must respond with greater speed to Indian requests. These are presently unnecessarily stalled and delayed . Likewise the Indians must become less rigid and centralized in their decision making and must be more

responsive to American requests. Americans complain that Indian responses are usually late, incomplete or, worse, non-existent. This may change with the development of trust between the bureaucracies, but nonetheless concerted efforts need to be made to address this issue. Once again, one way to develop this trust is by increased interaction between the service officers of the two countries.

Thirdly, the US should be careful that it does not convey an impression that it 'circumscribes' India's strategic options and freedom or limits its ability to address its security concerns. Like wise India must be pragmatic enough not to openly oppose US policies unnecessarily.

Fourthly, the US must be sensitive to the fact that India would not like to get drawn into any kind of balancing role against China that could spark an unintended stand off with that Asian giant. Also the US needs to be careful that by moving too quickly towards establishing mil-to-mil relations it could invite the charge of 'colonialism through the back door' from political dissenters in India.

CONCLUSION

There is much talk in informed circles and in the strategic communities in India, and to some extent the US, about the transformation in the 'strategic relationship' between the two countries. There has no doubt been a significant improvement in the military to military interaction, which, in comparison to earlier efforts at mil-to-mil co operation, appears nothing short of dramatic. It is significant that this has happened after India carried out the five nuclear tests in May 1998 and declared herself 'a state with nuclear weapons'. President Clinton's state visit to the sub continent in March 2000, is testimony

to the *sudden* importance attached to that region *after* the nuclear tests. The events of 9/11 only helped to accelerate the transformation, if any was needed. However despite this dramatic transformation it is still too early to claim that the relationship has acquired a 'strategic' status.

Two countries can be said to have a 'strategic relationship' if there is a convergence of regional security interests (necessarily) and global security interests (preferably). The overriding American security interest in the sub continent is; firstly the prevention of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan; secondly, to discourage the growth of nuclear weapons and missiles in the two countries and finally to promote stability in the region by facilitating the resolution of the contentious issues of Kashmir and terrorism. American global security interests are prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the global war on terrorism. As far as India is concerned its principal regional security interest is to bring to a halt cross border terrorism emanating from Pakistan. Secondly avoiding a war with Pakistan, except as a very last resort and when all other efforts to stop the menace of terrorism have failed. Thirdly to resolve the long standing border dispute with China. At the global level India's security interests are similar to those of the US.

The differences between the US and India are in their perceptions of the regional security concerns. On the issue of cross border terrorism, the US shies away from leaning on Pakistan to get it to address the menace once and for all, despite public assurances by President Musharraf to do so. India feels that the US has the diplomatic, economic and political clout to push Pakistan, but is unwilling to do so for fear of losing Pakistan's vital support in hunting down the elusive Taliban and Al Qaeda operatives. This has lead India

to conclude that the US is adopting double standards in its definition of terrorism. On the issue of nuclear weapons the US would ideally like to see the sub continent rid of all nuclear weapons. India has resolutely refused to concede to this concern because it sees it as a means to constrain its great power ambitions even as China (a potential competitor) not only consolidates and grows but also proliferates its nuclear and missile capability. Also India sees this as a blatant scheme to perpetuate the division of the world between the nuclear 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Clearly these differences are substantial and it would be too wishful to presume that they will simply go away.

When it comes to 'strategic cultures' once again there is hardly a meeting of minds between the two countries. American strategic culture is rooted in 'exceptionalism' and reliance on 'hard power' to pursue foreign policy objectives. Indian strategic culture is rooted in 'moralism' with a preference for 'soft power' to promote Indian foreign policy objectives. American belief is that it has the 'right to do good' but the Indian belief is that it is 'good to be right'. If the two countries can co operate, however, both could achieve what is 'good and right'. Happily there is a slow but steady understanding of these differing perceptions among the strategic elites of the two countries. That however does not mean that there is a congruence of strategic cultures. It may never be so. Therefore, if the two countries are serious about elevating the relationship to a strategic status it is imperative for security interests to converge.

Economic relations between the two countries are unlikely to drive the strategic partnership. Trade, commerce and economic interaction between nations is driven by profit motives of business and industry. In any case the economic interaction so far has been

lackluster. Ostensibly the slow pace of economic reforms in India are to blame for this. That may be true, but the fact remains that politicians in India (as in any country) are unlikely to accelerate the pace of reforms merely to placate American concerns without factoring the alienation of their domestic vote bases that may result. In addition, some of the issues of concern, such as tariff barriers, are not bilateral at all but come under the purview of the WTO.

In order to push the well meaning agenda of President GW Bush and Prime Minister AB Vajpayee, to improve Indo-US relations, the way forward is to move slowly with the intention of building trust especially through greater naval co operation and increased contacts between the military officers and institutions. Also the two sides must make conscious effort to address the sensitivities of the other party. Further the US must not constraint India's freedom of strategic decision making while India must not unnecessarily oppose the US as it has in the past.

In summary, therefore, it is too premature to conclude that there is a 'strategic partnership' developing between the so called 'natural allies'. The destination is clear but far; the journey long and difficult. Dramatic transformation in the mil-to-mil relations per se is not tantamount to a 'strategic partnership'. Nevertheless this can help build trust which is woefully lacking. Economic relations will grow at a pace independent of the strategic compulsions. Strategic relations can flower only if there is a convergence of security interests, even if the strategic cultures are at odds.

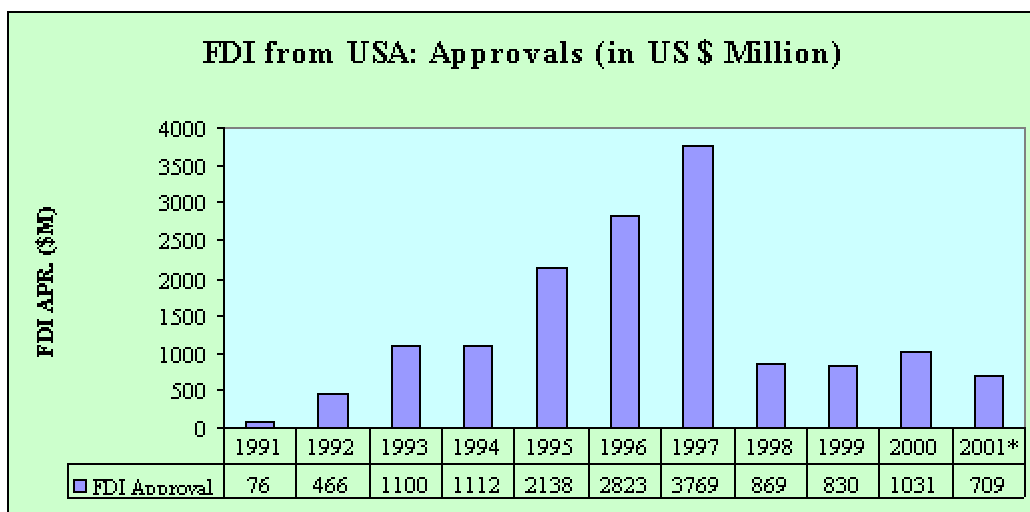
Appendix A

INDIA-US TRADE: CALENDAR YEAR 2002 (FIGURES FOR 2001 ARE IN BRACKETS)⁸¹

1. Indian merchandise exports to USA	= \$11.8 billion	(\$9.7 billion)
2. US merchandise exports to India	= \$ 4.1 billion	(\$3.8 billion)
3. India-USA merchandise trade [1+2]	= \$15.9 billion	(\$13.5 billion)
4. Indian IT/software exports to USA	= \$ 5.7 billion	(\$4.8 billion)
5. Total Indian exports to USA [1+4]	= \$17.5 billion	(\$14.5 billion)
<i>{Merchandise + IT/software exports}</i>		
6. USA services exports to India	= \$ 3.1 billion	(\$2.8 billion)
7. Total USA exports to India [2+6]	= \$ 7.2 billion	(\$6.6 billion)
<i>{Merchandise + Services}</i>		
8. Total India-USA trade [5+7]	= \$ 24.7 billion	(\$21.1 billion)
<i>{Merchandise + Indian IT/software exports + US services exports}</i>		
9. Merchandise trade gap [1-2]	= +\$7.7 billion	(+\$5.9 billion)
<i>(in India's favor)</i>		
10. Total trade gap [5-7]	= +\$10.3 billion	(+\$7.9 billion)
<i>(in India's favor)</i>		

⁸¹ http://www.indianemabssy.org/press_release/2003/mar/04.htm (April 10, 2003)

Appendix B



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